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Black Male Representations in Non-Urban Settings in The UK

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UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

BLACK MALE REPRESENTATIONS IN NON-URBAN SETTINGS IN THE UK

by

NATHANIEL TURNER

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial
fulfilment for the degree of

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Nathaniel Turner, University of Plymouth

Author's Signed Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Research Masters has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

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Abstract

Black Male Representations In Non-Urban Settings In The UK

NATHANIEL TURNER

Inspired by Frantz Fanon's assertion 'the Black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the White man' (Fanon,1982:110) this research project analyses the ways in which representation has affected the performativity of Black masculinity in non-urban settings in the UK. Framed by a Practice as Research methodology, this project utilises auto-biographic as well as auto-ethnographic methods aiming to construct alternative Black masculinity narratives which can counter hegemonic approaches in both academic and digital platforms.

This work examines my own lived experience in a city with a low ethnic diversity in order to explore the ways in which Black masculinity can be thought/lived/acted upon differently to other urban and more ethnically diverse locations. Finally, this work also discusses the role that education has had in the creation of "Blackness," from colonialism to the representations that are currently present in popular culture, and question why those representations are not always interrogated/embraced in places of low ethnic diversity.

Working within a Practice as Research framework this submission will include both a written thesis as well as digital performance.

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Introduction

This project aims to develop an understanding of my own position within the context of Black masculinity in a location of low ethnic diversity by using Practice as Research, utilising an autobiographic and autoethnographic methodological approach. With the creation of performances using practice as research, this work also examines the influence and the effect of mediated representation (and its concomitant colonialism) on the ontology of Black men with particular focus on contemporary Britain. Informed by my lived experiences growing up in Britain in both an ethnically diverse location such as Wolverhampton, In the west midlands and a place of low ethnic diversity, Ivybridge, located in the south west of England, where I attended secondary school, this thesis will discuss my treatment in both locations to explore the role that mass media has had on my own negotiation of race.

The origins of this project began with myself not being able to 'see' my own race. I grew up listening to rap music and enjoying music videos from both British grime artists and American rap and hip-hop artists, and even though these art forms were mostly dominated by Black men their race was unimportant to me. I was not familiar with seeing Black men on my television screens outside these forms but even during my stage of racial naivety, I observed in films and television, outside music, that Black men were presented as gangsters or "thugs". When looking at these figures, I struggled to find Black men that I could identify with, as I was not able to see on screen a Black character or role, I could see myself in. So, this led to the unconscious internalisation of the idea that I was not

“Black” as I did not match up to the mass media representations that were visible at the time. I began to see myself as “Black” because I was not white, not part of the dominant population that were seen in positions of power on my television screen. This influence on my upbringing highlights the importance of representation on the Black male psyche though it should be made clear that the images that I was seeing on screen were constructed with the political bias of the dominant white culture.

Charles Husband states that:

In Britain we have a variety of mass media operations which are dominated by white interest through ownership, staffing and the product that they produce. This would not be a matter for concern were it not that also in Britain there is a significant black population [...] The mass media play a significant part in sustaining the values and defining the immediate concerns of society. The media provide a perspective from which we view our world and it is the fact that they provide a ‘white’ perspective for interpreting events in a multiracial Britain that demands our attention, and action. (Husband, 1975: 15)

To reflect on this quote, I point to the age of Husband’s work in relation to mediated representation and throughout this thesis I argue the relevance of older research still being applicable in current discussions regarding race relations in lesser ethnic diverse locations- as it could be reasoned that there has not been a large amount of change between the writing of this quote and the present. This can be seen in relation to my lived experience but also in the lack of investment of presenting race in any other way besides an objective Black experience.

Bearing in mind the focus on the ‘white’ perspective there is no surprise that the media has reaffirmed the dominant cultures’ prejudices toward a growing Black population in Britain. An example of this is throughout the late 1960s and early

1970s the main site for coverage of Blackness on mainstream media was that Black immigration was a threat to the dominant culture.

This emphasising the social issues at the time where in places such as Birmingham (1981) and Liverpool (Toxeth Riots 1981), race riots and racial aggravated attacks occurred. It was at this time there was a surge of immigration of British passport holders from East Africa and though these people were holders of such passports, the threat of Black people made way for the labour government to rush through the 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act, 'an act specifically designed to discriminate against the entry of Black individuals to Britain' (Husband, 1975:17). I highlight the irony that is apparent in looking at these events, that is, that British culture by definition is a hybridised landscape made up from many different cultures appropriated without reference to their cultural vernacular. Young states 'British' is the name imposed by the English on the non-English.' (Young, 1995:3) Which presents the idea that 'Britishness' is not only a social construct but also a politically upheld idea informed by narratives from the British empire.

Brian Jacobs states:

'The widely held liberal view that British colonial expansionism was accompanied by the subordination of foreign nations and races is crucial, because under such circumstances the unequal relationships which developed between the imperial power and its subjects inevitably involved the suppression of nationalism in the colonies and the introduction of measures to ensure that the empire was protected against the incursion of rival expansionist powers' (Jacobs,1988,25)

This topic will be discussed later in chapter one, however it is important to note that the imposing of 'British' culture over other culture's is a tactic that Britain has used long before television presented racial power imbalances. In

addition to this, while culture and race are different, it has been understood that Black skin was not included in what is considered British.

The institutional racism that occurs on mediated platforms influences and is influenced by the social context of Britain itself; while this is one part of the argument it is also true that the British government promoted the division of Black and white, with their politics of immigration that gave validity to racist ideologies.

Due to this project being concerned with my own 'lived experience', I reflect on the legacy that this has had on my family. I had grown up in Wolverhampton throughout the 1990s and up until the age of 12 I had always been told to consider myself as 'British', by teachers at my school but also my family. Being in a location of ethnic diversity meant there was a shared difference and even though many of the students within my classroom were born outside of the United Kingdom, they too held on to the idea of being British. The umbrella term of "British" satisfied most as even though each child may have come from a different ethnic background, they could still feel part of a community. However, it could also be noted that it was in the school's best interest to promote this unity through the term 'British' to promote an inclusive environment within the school, in order to avoid conflict.

This schooling paired with my family's view of ethnicity influenced the approach of this project. From my earliest memories, I often recall older family members at dinner tables discussing the racial experiences encountered in the past. While the elders would argue how things were improving, I was yet to fully comprehend the issues surrounding the experience of growing up Black in Britain.

My family's ideal in relation to my heritage was that I was Black-British, with a focus and importance on 'British' due to the racism and poor treatment that my family had endured in the past, the emphasis of being British was a protest to state that we belong.

As I am the third generation in Britain, the event of the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrations Act is in living memory and resonates with my family and informs the importance of being seen as British by the dominant white population. The Black-British complexity itself presents a conflict in that Black is not included in the definition of British, a feeling that is felt in the lived experience of my family. This is due to the poor treatment my family endured throughout the 1950s and 1960s. My Grandad never told the stories of how he was treated when he arrived in Britain but how he raised his children was influenced by this treatment. My mother explained that my grandad actively encouraged her to associate herself with white children instead of her Black counterparts. This so that she is accepted and seen as British and part of the dominant culture instead of a cultural other. This went along with the use of the term Black-British which allowed my family to not be seen as African and contributed towards renouncing their African heritage to avoid negative treatment. This will be discussed further in Chapter One.

In thinking about my own experience, I remember in particular my relocation to Devon due to the treatment I received as it differed to the lived experience in Wolverhampton. In this new location there was a clear white dominant population to contend with and I was often questioned as to where I

came from. Not fully understanding what was meant by the question I would respond with “Wolverhampton” which did not satisfy the questioner. “Where do you *really* come from?” Would be the question that followed, as I was born in Wolverhampton, I struggled to find an answer to the questioner. I had been taught to be proud to state I was British. Once again, even without a full understanding of the complexities of race relations, this led to the unanswered question of why being British was held in such high regard within my family if we were not treated as this was our homeland.

The dominant culture that I was faced with identified me as different. The school I attended, Ivybridge Community College had 2300 students in attendance, and, at the time, my brother and I were two of six Black students. The rest of the demographic was made up of white students. However, it became apparent that the treatment that I was receiving was influenced by something other than just skin colour as I had often been described as the “whitest Black person” most had encountered. This was due to the way I comported myself in social situations with my interests being conformant to the interests associated with ‘white popular culture.’ In my schooling my interests included musical theatre, reading and not only listening to gangster rap which many of my peers believed was a barometer of ‘Blackness’. Not conforming to the fictional stereotypes meant that my cultural identity was brought into question by the dominant culture.

While living in Ivybridge, I was often interrogated for my behaviour as a ‘Black man’ even though it was clear there were few Black men in this location. Towards the end of my BA studies I started to question: If there were so few Black

people within the geographic location I lived in, then what were the influencing factors that allowed the dominant culture in this location to see my behaviour as abnormal? I started to suspect then that representation played an important role, as heightened presence of stereotypical representation within film, television and music that focusses on 'evil' Black men, is easily accessed in places of low ethnic diversity.

bell hooks states in *Reel to Real: race, sex and class at the movies* (1996) that 'movies remain the perfect vehicle for the introduction of certain ritual rites of passage that come to stand for the quintessential experience of border crossing of everyone who wants to take a look at difference and the different without having to experientially engage "the other"' (hooks, 1996:2). In the school that I had attended, I was often the first "Black" person other students had encountered, the only other experience that they had of Black men were through mass media, particularly film, which often informed their ideas towards Black men.

This offers an insight into one of the main issues that appears in places of low ethnic diversity. Due to the fact of there being little or no opportunity to engage with "the other" (in this case Black people) the only visibility given to the cultural other is presented through work created by the dominant culture. As these approaches often represent Black men in a homogenous two-dimensional narrative, one of the key aims of this research project is to present the idea of there being Black masculinities and that Black masculinity is not a fixed landscape but one that is multi-faceted made up of many different variables. Some of which

include family heritage, place of living and education which will be discussed later on in this thesis.

It may be argued that in some British urban settings where there is a significant Black population, representations can be actively challenged and subverted by members of those communities. However, outside of these areas (Ivybridge, for example) these images are accepted, and Black people are constantly compared to these representations.

Within my schooling, I began to identify in this situation as a signifier, a visual cue for the signified concept of Black masculinity to which my internal image, did not match. Due to the overrepresentation of Black men in gangster rap I was often compared to this hyper masculine performance of Blackness. Although I did not have the lived experience of the city struggle nor was I concerned in presenting myself in this way and conforming to this image presented.

The feeling of 'not belonging' is the genesis of this project. Being marginalised by the dominant culture as 'not being from here' yet at the same time not having a culture to revert back to. This left a feeling of inferiority as I had learnt to identify myself as British, yet it was often made apparent that I was not treated as such. An issue that became important to investigate was the kind of representation the dominant culture in this location had encountered regarding Black people. Representations that, in turn, educated their views of other cultures and in particular Black men, this will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

This explains the use of first person and anecdote in the writing of this thesis, the presentation of an intersectional approach to Black masculinity that

goes against mass media as well as lack of Blackness that was taught throughout my schooling. The lack of investment in Black men born in Britain is a place of concern to which more attention needs to be given. The use of subjectivity is key in the presentation of this work especially in the lived experience of Blackness. As Brittan and Maynard states 'domination always involves the objectification of the dominated; all forms of oppression imply the devaluation of the subjectivity of the oppressed' (Brittan and Maynard, 1984:199). It is for this reason that my own lived experience is being referenced in this work, in order to portray a subjective response in protest to the objective responses to the Black lived experience. In this work the term "he" or "they" will not be used in reference to the cultural others.

I will use 'I' in order to present a subjective real element to the work. Also, within this work I will use the terms Black and white, as this reflects the political reality that exists within the West. Both terms have been taken from race theory studies that will be studied and explored in Chapter One.

Within this work I reference Husband in the use of the term Black throughout this thesis in which he states:

'Black' has also been used because of its contemporary political connotations, for since racism is quintessentially a political reality it is appropriate to use a term which reflects the positive political consciousness of people who are rejecting an identity which has been imposed upon them and are not actively generating a positive black identity; one in which Black is not only beautiful but also powerful. (Husband,1975:10).

In addition to Race Theory this thesis is underpinned by a series of concepts, ideas and discussions by post- colonial scholars. A key term in this thesis is post

colonialism, the study of the aftermath of colonialism and the residual political, socio-economic, and psychological effects that has affected the standpoint in which I view this project.

Methodology

The project is conducted through practice as research, utilising aspects of autobiographic and auto-ethnographic research methods. The work is informed by practical exploration in order to critique the mediated image of Blackness that I have consumed. The use of autobiography allows ‘...the power to reclaim and rename my voice and body privately and in rehearsal, and then publicly in performance.’ (Heddon,2008 :3). The use of autobiography within this project allows the idea that ‘the position of self is relational’ (Heddon, 2008 :18) whilst taking into account that ‘identity is always part narrative, always in part a kind of representation. It is always within representation. Identity is not something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one’s own self. (Heddon,2008:27) Auto-ethnographic study binds the autobiographic aspect of the work with the wider political, cultural and social aspects of Blackness, in order for the work to critique the social construction that surrounds Blackness within Britain. As stated earlier this work follows a practice-as-research methodological approach as written by Robin Nelson (2006). Nelson’s model (see Figure 1) allows a dynamic approach to the research and gives a basis for the exploration of this project. The findings of this project have been reflected upon in the writing of this thesis as well as the final thesis performance.

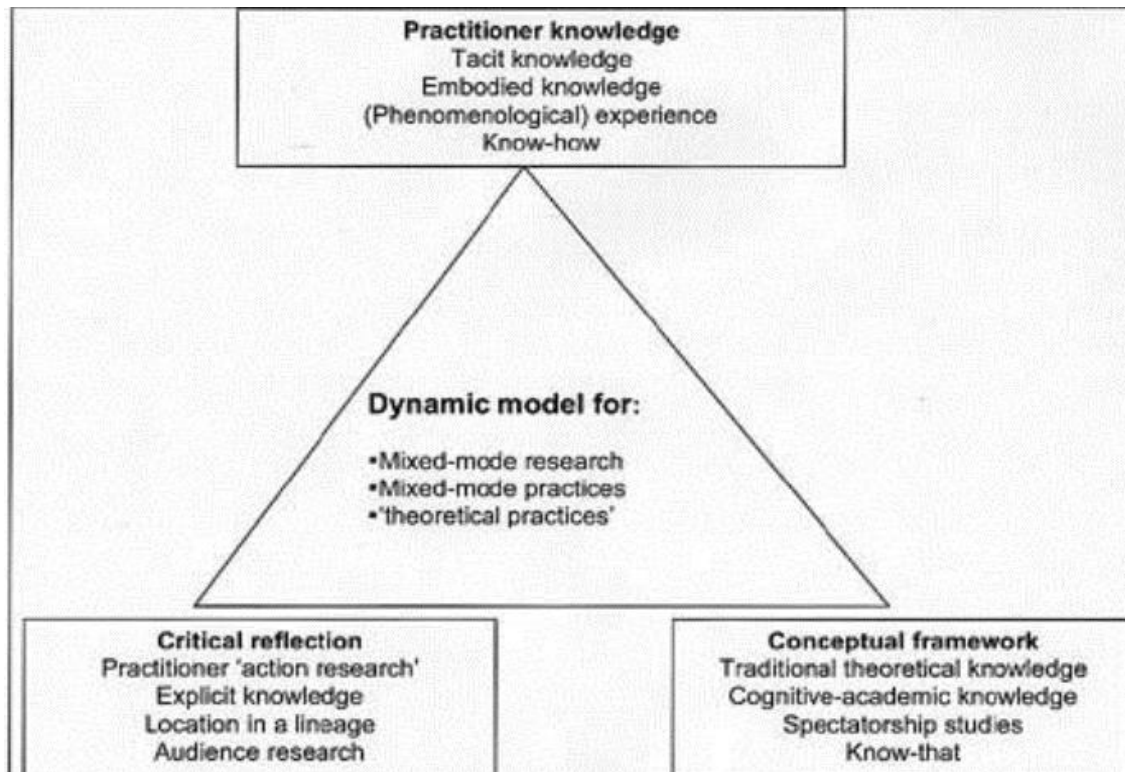


Figure 2: Robin Nelson's model of practice as research (2006).

This work will use Robin Nelson's model (2006) of practice as research which comprises of 'know what', 'know that' and 'know how' in relation to the work whilst incorporating autobiographic and auto-ethnographic methodologies.

In my work, I have applied Nelson's modes of knowledge in the following way:

- 1) 'Practitioner knowledge' focusses on the embodied knowledge surrounding my practice.

An example of this is the use of autobiographic performance, reflecting on my own lived experiences, making of live and digital performances as an aid to create material. The main research questions that are integral for this part are:

- 1.1. How can phenomenological experiences be transformed into performance to communicate the lived experience within the political reality of Blackness?
- 1.2. How can autobiographic performance help create alternative narrative to the media representations of Black masculinity in contemporary British performance?

- 2) The 'critical reflection' part of this project relies on the lineage of the performance development throughout the work. This part of the research focusses on the documentation of the performance to reflect both personally but also allow an online audience to reflect and respond to the work.

The main research question that this part of the research works towards is:

- What are the effects and legacies of post colonialism in contemporary Black Britain and how do these affect my performance of Blackness?

- 3) The conceptual framework that this work is led by is the post-colonial framework as presented by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Stuart Hall that will be discussed in Chapter One.

The main research question that this part of the project relates to:

- In which way can a practice led approach be used to investigate one's own agency as well as ontology of Black masculinity?

The writing of this thesis will offer a subjective reflection of research paired with practice as research using auto ethnographic and autobiographic methodologies. What follows is a brief summary of each chapter.

Chapter One 'History, Race and Biology', will focus on colonialism and the use of pseudoscience in the creation of ethnic hierarchy historically by the dominant culture. The chapter will discuss the creation of "race" as a power tactic to secure the white imperialist patriarchy's position in both the West and colonised countries in Africa, while also discussing the way in which the West negatively impacted the African diaspora to the extent that the trauma that was

inflicted at this time still continue to affect Black people today. This chapter will reference critical race theory in order to understand the make up Blackness.

Using this as a theoretical framework, my first practical experiment will be utilised in order to explore how the legacy of this political reality has informed my lived experience. Practice within this process will work as a method to interrogate and explore what race is, but also identify how this has affected my own identification of self within the locations that I have lived.

Chapter Two 'Race and Black men in the media' discusses the role in which media has had on reaffirming race relations in a social context. Focussing on the work by Charles Husband, this chapter will use practice as a way to explore the relationality of Black men and the dominant culture in a place of low ethnic diversity. My second performance will then inform how the media has affected race relations in places where there is low ethnic diversity. This chapter will include a discussion of how race theory has developed from a method of keeping "races" apart to a relationality that is complex which can be seen in popular culture, particularly film.

Chapter Three 'Race and Intersectionality', will discuss how intersectionality can be used as a method to present a subjective view of a marginalised community. While utilising the research and practice in Chapter One and Two, this chapter uses intersectionality as a way of merging the narratives of Blackness to create an intersectional performance.

Below is a table that shows the practical elements of this project:

Date	Title of the practice	Form of Practice	Purpose of Practice
23/04/2015	<i>What colour do you see?</i>	Live performance with video	-Locate myself within the landscape of Race theory. -Investigate my own understanding of self through the political reality of Blackness
12/04/2016	<i>Dual Heritage baby</i>	Live performance experiment (video)	-investigate the relationality of myself and the dominant culture -Locate myself through the lens of representation
10/08/2016	<i>Can you hear me?</i>	Podcast experiment	-Attempting to find a creative voice
12/03/2017	<i>Welcome to "my" city</i>	Video performance (online)	-utilising intersectionality within performance

Table 1: Summary of Practice

Chapter One: Race and Biology

This chapter will discuss key concepts and theories that underpin and inform my practice. In particular, I will focus on the creation of race as explained by Robert C Young whilst also engaging with critical race theory. Practice within this process will work as a method to first communicate and explore what race is, but also identify how race has affected my performance of self and identification of self. I plan to conclude this chapter by reflecting on my upbringing and the generational effects of race that dates back to colonialism and also discuss the role the dominant white population has had in the continuation of race in popular culture. Within this chapter I will use the term 'Black' in the discussion as a generic term for all non-white experiences within the west following Husband's approach discussed in the introduction of this work.

Creation of Race within The West

There have been many different interpretations of what "Race" is. An early 16th century definition states 'Each of the major divisions of human kind, having distinct physical characteristics' (Oxford Dictionary, 2017: Online). The origins of the term 'race' give the false impression of being biological, employing some phenotypical characteristics to categorise humans such as skin colour or body constitution. However, it is important to see how the term has developed into an ideological way of categorising humans culturally, socially, politically and economically. Informed by critical race theory, the theory that recognises that racism is ingrained in the make-up of American and British society, by using this analytical lens it is possible to examine the existing power structures that are

based on white privilege and white supremacy which perpetuates the marginalisation of people of colour.

One of the main 'distinct physical characteristics' that race focused on was skin colour and in the discussion of Race theory coined in the 19th century Young highlights that Race Theory's main aim was to 'keep races apart' (Young, 1995:8). This was done by explaining the difference in human "species" in scientific terms even though 'Race theory' was in fact a populist idea. Within Race Theory there was an idea that humans existed on a '[g]reat chain of being' (1995) in which early anthropologists decided that African were at the bottom, with great ambivalence present about whether to categorise the Black Africans as either ape or human.

As Young states:

if there be various species of mankind, there must be a natural aristocracy among them, a dominant white species as opposed to the lower races who by origin are destined to serve nobility of mankind and may be tamed, trained, and used like domestic animals, or may, according to circumstances, be fattened or used for physiological or other experiments without any compunction. To endeavour to lead them to a higher morality and intellectual development would be as foolish as to expect that lime trees would, by cultivation bear peaches, or the monkey would learn to speak by training. Wherever the lower races prove useless for the service of the white man, they must be abandoned to their savage state it being their fate and natural destination. All wars of extermination, whenever the lower species are in the way of the white man, are not only excusable, but fully justifiable. (Young, 1995:7)

Young makes clear in his writing that this notion was problematic and the white man in this narrative used science in order to make the treatment of Black men seem legitimate as if it was based in science. Though race was a pseudo-scientific theory included many factors to legitimise the claims that Africans were

a different species. One example put forward was the assertion that a Black and a White sexual partner would produce offspring that would be infertile due to the idea that two separate species are not able to produce fertile offspring (a clear reference to animals such as mules). Young states that 'no one bothered too much about the differences between the races until it was to the West's economic advantage to profit from slavery or defend against the abolitionists' (Young, 1995: 92). In that respect it is possible to see how 'race, therefore, like ethnicity, has always been a cultural, as well as a political, scientific and social construction' (Young, 1995: 93)

I focus on the prominence of the term race in the experience I often had whilst living in Ivybridge. When out with my family, my brother and I, would be asked whether we were full or half-brothers, this due to the difference in the colour of our skin. Following these comments the person asking would often exclaim that my brother looked 'Mixed- Race' due to his lighter complexion. In hindsight this did not happen often in living in Wolverhampton, but it is important to note that the ideas of race are still present in today's conversations. Identifying the origins of race is important in this project as with the acceptance and use of race as an identifier, a person can accept (or challenge) the ideologies that go with the use of racial terms.

1.2 Post Colonialism and The Black Mindset

As I explained in the introduction, I had learned to identify as 'Black-British', a complexity taught to me by elders within my family. The teaching I had regarding this complexity was not something that had been challenged within my family as it was a term that was used affectionately, passed down generationally without

questioning how politically charged this complexity was. The issue with this was the lack of origin in the title and the focus on 'race' or skin colour paired with 'British'.

In relation to the acceptance of 'Black' within my family, I refer to post-colonialism as there is a link between the colonialism that occurred in Africa that in turn influenced the African diaspora to cut ties with their origins, which can be seen in my family. This is an erasure of our Black ontology that continues to affect the narratives we are told about ourselves.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in his discussion of identity offers a description in Kenya, of the violent effects that such a rupture has caused. He states:

Africa has had such a fate in the world that the very adjective African can call up hideous fears of rejection. Better then to cut all the links with this homeland, this liability, and become in one giant leap the universal man. (Thiong'o,1986:26)

This belief that African heritage was a negative characteristic was an idea that was imposed on the colonised of Africa by the West and was done in a calculated manner in order to assert dominance for the West's economic gain. The radical way in which this was done was through what Ngugi Wa Thiong'o identifies as the 'Cultural Bomb'. For Thiong'o the effect of the 'Cultural bomb' was to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity in their capacities and ultimately themselves' (Thiong'o ,1986:3)

Thiong'o also explains the way in which the White imperial patriarchy-imposed English on the Kenyan population to erase the culture that was held within the vernacular tongue of the Kenyan people whilst also promoting loyalty

to the West. This paired with propaganda that was promoted through novels that contained stories of characters who moved from the darkness of the pre-colonial past to the light of Christian (white) present. Notions such as this further implanted the inferiority complex on the Kenyan people who learnt to associate being African with non-achievement, to the extent that many African academic writers and scholars began to write in English over their vernacular tongue.

Chinua Achebe, reflecting on this process, enquires:

[I]s it right a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful portrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it. (Achebe in Thiong'o, 1986:7)

As a way of removing the western influence that had affected Kenya through western imperialism a movement began where African writers reverted to using their vernacular tongue in academic writing, going against the notion that scholarly work needs to be accepted by western thinking. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o stopped writing in English in 1981 instead writing in Gikuyu, as to Thiong'o, language held culture. Thiong'o believed that when you remove a people's language you erase their memory therefore allowing people to become unconnected to their cultural history.

Until this point, it was understood in Kenya that learning English would allow an African to be 'lifted above their savage status' (Fanon, 1967) in the eyes of the West.

The teaching that was included in the colonised countries of Africa as well as the creation of Race within the West is an important timeline to take in consideration of due to the fact that in both instances there is an attempt to

present an ideological hierarchy in which White is best. The domination that the West had on the colonised countries of Africa taught the colonised not to believe in their own heritage, colour or history, something which was done for the economic gain of the west. Race theory used pseudo-scientific terms in order to prove the White man's superiority to other races to justify the negative treatment given to the "lower races". While I focus on the Britain and Kenya in relation to colonialism, there are other narratives of colonialism that are present historically.

Frantz Fanon in his analysis of post colonialism in *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) highlights the psychological effects that colonisation has had on the African diaspora and it is possible to see how these effects have been passed down generationally as time has gone on. In relation to my family, for example, there has never been an instance where any of us has questioned why we have never been able to locate our African origins. Throughout this project I aimed to investigate possible reasons for why this may have been. Through the study of post colonialism, and the study of the lasting impact that colonialism left on the former colonies, I attempted to find reason as to why my family has been complicit in colonial ideals.

In writing about the racial conflict in Britain, Jacobs writes 'While paternalism modified the 'physical' side of British imperial rule, it also produced some very crude racist stereotypes. The conception of native Africans as 'savages' was a common one which was extended to descriptions of African native culture and social attitudes. The Africans had to be 'civilised' according to British ways, and this usually involved dramatic adaptations by the Africans in order to fall in

line with colonial expectations. Deviations from the colonial 'norms' were thus another source of irritation for the British and a further excuse for eradicating native civil practices.' (Jacobs, 1988:26) This showing that while Britain was interested in imperialism to increase its countries' power Britain also wanted to promote nationalism to the colonised in order to promote reliance to Britain by presenting that Britain enriched Africa.

As mentioned in the introduction, my family have always held onto the ideal of being Black British. To give context my Grandad was the first generation in Britain, coming from Jamaica and in moving to England in the 1950s where he obtained factory work in Dudley. Currently, my Grandad still lives in Dudley and while Dudley is an ethnically diverse place, the estate that he lives on is predominantly white and is in fact the only Black household of the street. When visiting when I was younger, I never questioned this and thought that it was just a coincidence that he lived in a street in a largely a white area. Though the inferiority complex that had been instilled on the Black mind is likely to be a factor in my Grandad's decision to live in the location that he does. In living in a white neighbourhood, instead of having to negotiate the social politics of minority communities, he instead attempts to become part of the dominant culture by integrating himself by adhering to the dominant cultural norms.

Franz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* (1982) speaking on the displacement of the African diaspora within the West states that:

People whose soul inferiority complex has been created by death and burial of its local cultural originality finds itself face to face with the language of the civilising nation; that is, with the culture of the mother

country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his Blackness, his jungle. (Fanon, 1982:19)

Though this 'soul inferiority complex' could have been embedded in my families' mind-set generations before my grandad, the legacy is still present in the aspirational behaviour of my Grandad and my family, an unconscious and contradictory aspiration to become white British. The idea of becoming 'whiter' is something that is clear in the behaviour of my Grandad when displaced in Britain, which he has done to offset the negative treatment that he received in the face of racial discrimination.

Frantz Fanon states in *Black Skin White Masks* (1982) the fact that Black men have no ontology in comparison to the white man. For Fanon Black men 'merely' exists in *comparison* to the White man in the West. He states that:

As long as the Black man remains in his home territory, except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others. There is in fact a "being for other," as described by Hegel, but any ontology is made impossible in a colonized and acculturated society... Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some people will argue that the situation has a double meaning. Not at all. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. From one day to the next, the Blacks have had to deal with two systems of reference. Their metaphysics, or less pretentiously their customs and the agencies to which they refer, were abolished because they were in contradiction with a new civilization that imposed its own. (Fanon, 1982:109)

Fanon's quote highlights the issues with the lived experience of Black men within the Western context as there is a complexity present of how a Black man should behave in this new location. It is important to note that in this new location the black person now finds himself, systematic, institutional racism exists in way

they benefit the white dominant culture. In this new location in which the Black person now finds himself, white supremacy and white privilege is ingrained in the dominant culture's thinking meaning that although a member of the dominant culture may not identify as racist, they are born into a privilege in which a Black person will never obtain.

Patricia Hill Collins explains,

In order for those of you who are White to develop empathy for the experiences of the people of color, you must grapple with how your white skin has privileged you. This is difficult to do, because it not only entails the intellectual process of seeing how whiteness is elevated in institutions and symbols, but it also involves the often painful process of seeing how your whiteness has shaped your personal biography (Collins,1993:461)

When considering the Black man in this new location, he is not able to revert back to the historic cultural norm that was taught before colonialism, instead he must conform to the cultural norm of the white imperial patriarchy which had no cultural basis in his previous location. A Black man in this new location within the West must now imitate the societal role of the white man, even though his historical struggles through colonialism and his enforced adoption of a racial signifier set him back, inhibiting him from ever being able to successfully perform that role.

I reference my Grandad in response to this issue regarding the performance of Blackness and to an extent, masculinity. With the struggles of trying to negotiate this territory of being in a new location and adhering to the social standards that are present in the west my Grandad made deliberate choices in order to be seen as equal to the white man in the place where he lives. Frantz Fanon states:

There is a fact: white men consider themselves superior to Black men.
There is another fact, Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs,
the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect (Fanon
1982:10)

This thinking is in reaction to the phenomenon of whiteness within the west as
'white identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of
white supremacy. DiAngelo, 2018: 149) Therefore, in the same vain, Blackness
does not exist in a place where the racial boundaries have not been created and
made a part of society.

In my own experience in going to school in Devon, I often experienced
racist comments on how I behaved, and I received comments such as "coconut" or
"bounty".

The reasons for this was due to how I was "Black" on the outside but white on the
inside. Though it is clear that these comments have roots in race theory, through
this project I made links between these comments and Frantz Fanon's comments
on 'Denegrification' which made 'it possible for the miserable negro to whiten
himself and this to throw off the burden of that corporeal malediction'
(Fanon,1991:111). 'Denegrification' in this context meant that Black people would
conform to the social hegemonic norms set out by the dominant white
population, such as speaking English, and conforming to gender and societal
cultural norms in order to lift them above their 'savage' status within the West.
Though in doing this, this did not allow Black people to be treated as equal and
Black men were still not able to fulfil the masculine ideal within the West due to
the ingrained social, economic politics that favour the dominant culture.

Even though I had not attempted to ‘act white’ in any part or social context deliberately, it could be argued that, historically within my family, the choices that we have made (particularly in relation to the omission of certain parts of my family’s heritage) a level of ‘denegrification’ could have been present in order to avoid difficult social situations. In the current contemporary setting the issue of being “too white to be Black” produces a different issue in my own lived experience. It is clear in comments like this that there is a “correct” way to act Black and by not conforming to this idea of Blackness, another form of discrimination becomes present, which informed this part of the work.

1.3 Race in Practice

The first practical research experiment attempted to locate where I placed myself within the political reality of Race. This work predated my masters, however this project worked as a preface to the further study that came thereafter. The experiment was titled ‘*What Colour Do You See?*’ and explored Frantz Fanon ideas on ontology and the legacy that Race theory politics had placed on my own body in a contemporary setting.

I began an interrogation of existing work and one of the key influences was a performance named *Moj and the Antarctic*. *Moj and the Antarctic* is inspired by the true story of Ellen Craft, a 19th century African American slave who escaped to freedom by disguising herself as a white man. The performance focusses on Ellen’s story of race and cross-dressing whilst extending the story and merging this with fiction. *Moj and the Antarctic* develops into the fantasy of when Ellen arrives in Victorian London and finds work as a sailor on a wailing ship that is heading toward the southern seas. During the play we see the men’s obsession

with Black face minstrelsy. Eventually the ship arrives in the Antarctic and Moj becomes the first Black woman to step foot on Antarctica.

The topics raised in this performance include, race, gender and location and this assisted in gaining a direction for my work. A particular interest was that of a person of colour being in a place where Black people do not occupy the location, also, the relationality of a Black woman disguised as a white man in order to appease the dominant culture. In the story, it is clear to see that due to Moj's lighter complexion she is able to pass as white. This performance resonated with me for this reason, I wanted to create performance that I was able to place myself within the present whilst also presenting that I was in space where Black people lacked the visibility which is similar to that of Moj when she arrives in Antarctica but also during the performance, as even though she was a Black woman, this aspect of Moj is not seen due her presenting herself as a white man.

I began to use the idea of whiting up due to the influence of this performance, I was able to link this to Frantz Fanon's ideas of how Black men, in accepting and conforming to social norms, he becomes whiter as he renounces his heritage. I also wanted to link this work to Nella Larsen's idea of 'passing' (1929) in which Black people of lighter complexions would bleach their skin and or use make up so they could 'pass' as white and therefore fit into a society which excluded and treated Black people badly. 'Passing' pre-dated the work of Frantz Fanon as well as *Moj and the Antarctic* however I attempted to intertwine theoretical knowledge, lived experience and aesthetics into practice.

As this was an experimental part of the work, I did not document the experimentation of whitening my skin. In the first instances of experimentation, I used white paint over my skin to disguise my Blackness in a studio setting. Though in reflecting on how this looked, the paint on my brown skin did not communicate symbolically the complexity of the lived experience. The white paint aimed to demonstrate the role the dominant culture had had on my own personal view of my own ethnicity, as I at the time chose not to see colour. Yet, I felt I was in a situation of being on a spectrum of both Black and white which would alter dependant on the social situation that I was in. Upon the conclusion of this first experiment, after removing the white paint from my skin, I learnt and developed a way of linking this to the research that I had undertaken. In the “real but not real” (as I was white but still black) landscape that was present when I applied white paint to my skin, I was able to link this to the quasi- scientific aspects of race theory, the idea that the social hierarchy is “real” only because it is socially upheld and has been created in order to be bias to the dominant culture.

The further development of this explored adding my lived experience to the work whilst also linking this with ontology and race. Then I developed a visual language in order to see how I could further the practice with aspects of Blacking up. In doing this, I again used paint to make myself darker,(this was done as an attempt to point that I was only Black due to the white population in the location where I lived deciding I was black and I was thus seen as Black in comparison the dominant white population). The use of Black on my own skin felt a lot more uncomfortable than the use of white, which raised questions as to why this felt so uncomfortable in this studio environment, whereas ‘whiting up’ felt more

comfortable? I concluded that white paint felt more comfortable due to it feeling like a protest within the landscape, the idea that I shouldn't be doing this, but I was, and doing so was challenging the treatment of the dominant culture in this location. By 'whiting up' I could show the white population what it feels like to be Black and how I've been treated. This paired with the issue that I was always told that I was "the whitest Black person" meaning that "blackening up" felt like I was losing my own whiteness and becoming fully subservient to the Black person that the dominant culture assigned me.



Figure 2.1: What Colour Do You See? Performance (2015)

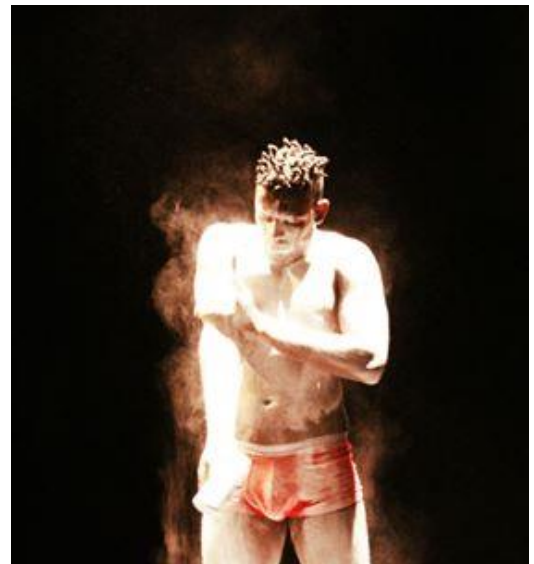


Figure 3.2: What Colour Do You See? Performance (2015)

After reviewing the work, I felt that both the "whiting up" and "Blackening up" needed to be part of the final video installation, instead of the use of white paint, I used talcum powder (figure 2.1 and 2.2). This was done so that I was able to apply the Black paint on top the talcum powder without the colours mixing and creating a grey colour. This was important due to the prominence of white and Black in Race theory and also the prominence in the binary that I was offered in being Black British. As Blackness is often excluded from British culture historically

it was important to present the division between Britishness and Blackness with the use of Black and White paint.

The use of both white and Black, attempted to present the complexity that was held in being Black in a place of low ethnic diversity and signify the issues that occur as a result of being born Black British. My skin puts me in a situation of marginalisation that is, (a non-British British), yet, if I am not British and have no answer as to where I came from, I am therefore left in a position of being Black purely because the dominant culture says so, Which relates directly to critical race theory, though at this point of my research project, I had not yet made links to this theory.

The final video material showcased me using both the talcum powder and black paint which can be seen (Appendix 1). However, I did not feel that the video alone was able to communicate the issues fully, as even symbolically, it presented a number of racial issues in a simplistic way. The work was developed so that the video installation went alongside a live performance. In this work I recited the racial slurs and jokes I had received growing up, such as: "Show me your hand" to which I would show the dark side of my hand, "no the other side, and when I would turn my hand over to show its pale white side they would reply: "see there is some good in you." Repeating these comments in this setting allowed me to negotiate with the words and the messages behind the slurs and present the treatment that is still present in the contemporary setting. In doing this, I was also able to critique the notion that racism is an issue that occurs elsewhere and highlight that Blackness works in relation to whiteness. Due to being in a location

such as Ivybridge, I had never confronted these racial jokes or slurs. Instead I learnt to ignore these comments or laugh at them to show I was not bothered by its racist undertones. Nevertheless, facing these words in practice I noticed I had internalised these racist ideas by not protesting this throughout my schooling as I had come to terms with this being “how things are”. Though DiAngelo states that ‘whiteness rests upon the foundational premise: the definition of whites as the norm or standard for human, and people of colo[u]r as a deviation from the norm’ (DiAngelo, 2018:25) which highlights that although I had been taught about my Blackness by my family, I had not taken into account the reason as to why I was considered Black, I was only Black as the dominant culture had constructed whiteness to benefit them.

This realisation was problematic to myself due to noticing that I was complicit to the dominant cultures racial hierarchies by allowing myself to be laughed at due to the colour of my skin. This behaviour directly links to the work of Fanon and the ‘soul inferiority complex’. The ‘soul inferiority complex’ had always been an idea that I had distanced myself from within this research project.

I began this project with the internalised idea that being below the dominant culture was something inherited, passed down generationally and I had no way of changing this narrative. This due to being taught to declare that I was British in the face of racism and work hard in order to be accepted. Although, In doing this, I had been complicit in continuing the narrative in the way I behaved in the presence of the dominant culture and I in fact had the agency to alter this narrative by seeing myself as both Black and part of the dominant culture and

should therefore fight for visibility that I am British and Black rather than Black British.

The recognition of this felt like a betrayal of 'my culture' due to an indirect tendency to admire the western culture and to act in accordance to the dominant culture's social position. I had become a 'universal man' instead of acknowledging that I was being othered by the dominant white population in this location. It was this first finding through practice that presented a direction to my work, as it was at this point, I realised that I had been policed by the dominant culture on how I should perform my Blackness and I had found a way of coping in the face of racism to save face. Gary Barker in the book *Dying to be men- Youth men and social exclusion* discusses the hyper-black, an act that presents '...an exaggerated masculine version of self that serves as a coping mechanism to maintain "face" or self-respect in the face of racism- particularly forms of racism that emasculate black men' (Barker,2005:43). Though I had not done this throughout my schooling, examples of this are frequent in Black popular culture which can be seen in music and hip hop (some of which will be discussed further in Chapter Two). I had developed another way of dealing with this treatment in the cultural isolation that I was situated opting to "white up" in a social context as opposed to the "blacking up" that can be seen in the "hyperBlackness"

This first performance took place in Plymouth University with the audience present mainly comprising of white students. Upon the conclusion of the performance a few members of the audience commented that my work was racist due to the act of whitening my skin. This became generative for the later work

within this project due to the responses only having issue with the whiting up and not the Blacking up of my own skin. One audience member stated that, if a white person were to “Black up” they would be called racist and as such I should be called racist also. I argued that this was not possible due to power imbalances created historically by the dominant culture and that my work was a challenge to racial hierarchies and not racist. Though it was curious that a performance about my own subjectivity and my individual response to the racial imbalances that I had in this location was met with this response, especially in a location where this narrative is not one that is often shared. The response that I received ignored my own lived experience, with the white population deeming my work to be ‘exaggerated’ or ‘untrue’ due to the white person not having the same lived experience, white privilege became a topic of conversation, bringing to the forefront the ontological value of Black skin.

This chapter has allowed me to locate myself in the political, social construct of race theory and through the exploration of Frantz Fanon’s ideas of post colonialism and provided an introduction to critical race theory, I have examined how these legacies have informed my performance of Blackness in a contemporary setting. Through understanding the purpose of Race Theory and post colonialism I have been able to assess the influence the dominant culture has had in both the African diaspora as well as other phenomenon experienced by Black people born in Britain. This can be seen in the analysis of my family and the research into colonialism and post colonialism. With the creation of the performance of *What Colour Do You See?* I have been able to accept that I have

embodied social politics that have history in both Race Theory and colonialism and that, at the time there has not been a level of agency in my performance of self.

Chapter 2: Race and Black Men in The Media

This chapter will discuss the way in which the legacies of race and colonialism have informed the representation of Black men in popular culture, focussing on print and film media. Following on from Chapter One, this chapter will use critical practice in order to plot the correlation of representation and the relationality of the Black male.

In the beginning of this Masters project, I began reviewing the Western media that I had grown up watching and accepting without questioning. In that review, I also took note of how representation has changed from a clear and obvious portrayal of ethnic difference to more covert, less noticeable narratives of racial difference.

To begin the discussion of relationality I begin with Stuart Hall's idea of the "ethnic gaze". Hall examines the 'wests fascination with bodies of Black men and women of other ethnicities' (Hall,1996:467) and argues that the presence of this gaze is due to the dominant culture having the dominant lens, the lens the white imperial patriarchy, have license to view foreign ethnicities as 'other' in comparison to the dominant culture. This othering has a basis in colonial and slave narratives and allows the dominant culture to view the other cultures as 'exotic'. Although, it is clear that the West's fascination with the cultural other is underpinned by a conceptualisation in which Black people are considered to be a different species this did not stop many colonial novelists to explore a sexual colonial desire for the other. Young states:

The travel writings of Burton, Haggard, Stevenson, Kipling, Allen, or Buchan are all concerned with forms of cross-cultural contact, interaction, an active desire

frequently sexual, for the other, or with the state of being what Hanif Kureishi calls 'an inbetween...' (Young, 3: 1995)

This sexual infatuation with otherness, is an aspect that I focus on this stage of my Masters' project.

At this stage of my research, I was in long term relationship with a white woman and, amongst our friends, it was often mentioned, that my partner and I would create "beautiful mixed babies." Although this was something that on face value could be read as a passing comment, I began to question the reason why I was faced so often with this statement. Close friends would sometimes expand further in myself having a child, stating that my child will have "lovely tanned skin".

2.1 Race and Aesthetics in Print Media

I became curious as to what inspired this infatuation with mixed children for this comment to be said so often. I then began to look at print media present and clothing adverts in particular, due to an overrepresentation of young mixed children in campaigns. These campaigns were often visible within the South West, yet in this location there was not much diversity to warrant the use of these mixed heritage children.

In November 2015, I attended the 'Black Theatre symposium' at the National Theatre, and during the Keynote speech, presented by Mojisola Adebayo, she highlighted some of the issues with the representation of Black people in popular culture. During this keynote speech Adebayo focused on advertising and

the use of young mixed children in both television and print mediums and used the H&M 2015 clothing campaign as an example.



Figure 4.1: Advert H&M Campaign 'City Explorers' (2018)



Figure 3.2: Advert H&M Campaign 'City Explorers' (2018)

At the time, there were different images that she showed for the attendees to look and debate the issues with the photos. The general consensus in the room was that the images seemed tokenistic. Since this talk, I again revisited the H&M

website to which the same narrative still seems apparent. In the photos (see figure 3.1 and 3.2) in both images, there is one mixed child amongst several white children. Though this representation is often ignored, these types of images have not changed in the three years since I first was made aware of these H&M campaigns and this is just one example of the multiple examples of this practice as there has been a large history of kids clothing campaigns using mixed heritage children to sell products.

H&M later moved to a more sinister way of using race within their advertising with their use of Black children. In the “coolest monkey in the jungle” campaign, a dark skinned Black child is pictured in the garment whereby the slogan has links to racial histories whereby Black people were labelled as primitive, in addition to this, the slogan included “cool” which also links to the racialisation of Black people which will be discussed later on within this chapter. This advert brings to the forefront issues of race and the prominence of race within advertising and representation, as a child of 5 years old is already being racialised as Black in a contemporary society where it is possible to see narratives of white privilege and supremacy. While this advert was later removed, H&M also paired this release with a white child with the slogan ‘survival expert’ presenting the coloniser colonised connotations.



Appendix 3:3 'Coolest monkey in the jungle' January 2018

In looking at H&M's campaigns it is possible to come to the conclusion that shades of skin are viewed and presented differently, darker skin tones are furthest away from whiteness and worst as a result.

The use of Black children with lighter skin tones in advertising often appeases the dominant cultures' desire for the cultural other, while also allowing Black people to feel a level of progression due to being able to be visible in mainstream adverts. However, this comes at a cost, as due to overrepresentation of Black children with light skin, this marginalises Black children of darker complexions, as they are not able to get the same visibility as their lighter counterparts. When viewing the two aforementioned adverts you are able to see that advertising does two things, it leads to both the dominant culture and Black population to value lighter skin over

darker skin but it also boosts the desire for more black children with light skin or mixed dual heritage kids.

This shows a level of colourism that is present in advertising but shows a change of tolerance that has developed from Race theory within the West. As before the media and advertising became so prominent, divisions of race were Black and white, with people of mixed heritage categorised as Black. However, in this new landscape there is a hierarchy of skin tones to which only certain lighter shades will be chosen for advertising campaigns.

2.2 Race in Film

After engaging with print media, I then also looked to film as a possible influence on how the dominant culture views Black skin. bell hooks, in discussing how racially inscribed media, eludes to the fact that by ‘...opening a magazine or book, turning on a television set, watching a film, or looking at photographs in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of black people that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy’ (hooks,1992:1). Though these images may be created by white people who would not identify as racist, nor would they have intended to uphold racial hierarchies, this history in representation has created a lens that both the dominant culture as well as Black people have learnt to accept. Within the Black community, Black people may see the world through the lens of white supremacy, as a form of internalised racism.

I began this project in 2015 and at the time I identified two key film texts that were exemplary to the representations of Black men that I was familiar with. These two films were *Boyz ‘n’ The Hood* (1991) and *Brotherhood* (2016). In

plotting this history of representation, I reference both bell hooks' and Katharine Bausch's interpretation of the film *Boyz 'n' The Hood* (1991). The film concerns a young African-American man growing up in Los Angeles. His mother believes that she cannot give Tre what he needs to become a man, so decides he lives with his father. Throughout the film, the audience are introduced with a multitude of social, cultural and political issues that are prominent to the Black community, such as police racism, violence, drugs, AIDS, as well as gentrification and Black male sexuality. Tre's sexuality is an important topic throughout the film, and it is linked to his maturity. When Tre first appears as a young adult his father mocks him for being young, and when Tre becomes defensive and argues his maturity, his father, Furious, asks him if he is a virgin. This is a deliberate creative decision as Tre, in an attempt to prove he is a man, shares a fictional sexual instance, with the film presenting the fantasy sequence. Katharine Bausch identifies 'that it is *only* in fantasy that Tre's manhood is linked to his sexuality' (2013). I identify this due to a hegemonic narrative that has been portrayed in music and film where Black men are controlled by their sexuality, and this is a fantasy that Black men have clung onto in the face of oppression, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

bell hooks commenting on "*Boyz 'N The Hood*" (1991) states

These images were painful to watch. That's is how it should be. It should hurt our eyes to see racial genocide perpetuated in black communities, whether fictional or real. Yet in the theater where I saw this film, the largely black audience appeared to find pleasure in these images. This response was a powerful testimony, revealing that those forms of representation in white supremacist society that teach black folks to internalize racism are so ingrained in our collective consciousness that we can find pleasure in images of our death and destruction. (hooks,1992:6)

bell hook's interpretation of '*Boyz*' allows for alternative reading of the film to be seen as a horror film. Before interrogating this film, I like many others enjoyed '*Boyz*'.

I did not find the film problematic due to often seeing similar narratives. To focus on Tre in 'Boyz', a comparison can be made between him and the popular 'Final girl' that appears in horror films like *Scream* (1990) which fits within the slasher sub-genre. The classic 'Final Girl' trope is normally located within a group of teenagers that are having a good time within the film and ends with all but the 'Final Girl' dead. Within these films, the filmmaker aims to create a story that forces the audience to empathise and have a connection with the main character, so in doing this they usually create this main character as a small, terrified woman instead of a tall muscular angry male. Alongside the main character there are often popular archetypes that include The Jock, The Slut and The Nerd. The filmmaker throughout the narrative attempts to create ambiguity for the audience by making it uncertain who is going to live and who is going to die and having a large cast to begin with helps with this. The 'Final Girl' often develops from a shy innocent girl in the beginning to the most resourceful and intelligent upon the film's conclusion that on occasion defeats the killer.

The comparison to Tre to the 'Final Girl' is possible for many reasons, one being that in this film Tre is a virgin throughout most of the film, which is connected to his innocence often in the film. It could be also argued that the 'killer' in the film is more complex, than a singular person that is prevalent in a slasher film. One 'killer' in 'Boyz' could be the police that is menacing to Tre and his friends, which affects Tre and takes his innocence away when he later loses his virginity after the altercation with the police. Another active theme present within the film is gang violence to which Tre loses his friends to, which again is another 'killer' within the plot. However, it is important to clarify that the gang violence that is present is a consequence of the American political system not being concerned with the ghetto and minorities. The narrative highlights that society is concerned with capitalism in

which gentrification was displacing the minorities that live there, though it was likely that the dominant culture situated the minorities in this location in the first place. Tre's father, Furious, explains that parts of the ghetto was being bought by whites which would increase the price of living until they are unable to live there anymore. Showing that the borders of whiteness are not based on skin colour alone and include wealth and class. This narrative real-life application within British racial politics as in May 1983 the Commission for Racial Equality served notice on the London Borough of Hackney under the 1976 Race Relations Act where it was found that council housing was distributed differently between White and Black people.

Jacobs states

It was found that:

1. Blacks were less likely than whites to be given houses and maisonettes, and therefore received more flats.
2. Blacks were more frequently accommodated on the undesirable inter-war estates and were much less likely than whites to be allocated brand new properties
3. Blacks received a larger proportion of flats above the more favoured ground and first floor levels than did whites. (Jacobs,1988:112)

Since this time, Hackney has become victim to gentrification with the location being included in development projects that displace minorities that do not earn enough to live in the now newly developed area with increased living costs.

Tre also features the characteristics of the 'Final girl' trope due to him developing throughout the film to evade adversity but also avoiding being killed. He escapes many 'killers' within the ghetto that include the gangs and the police. It is possible in this respect that the ghetto in itself could be explained as a 'killer' when read through the lens of a horror film. As Tre was born into a family that were not affluent, he became a victim of his surroundings, meaning that drugs, gangs, police violence and AIDS become issues that he

had to contend with as soon he is placed within this location. Upon the conclusion of the film, Tre gets out of the ghetto through education leaving the place to go to college. Though Tre leaves, the situation that he leaves still remains the same.

Thanks to bell hook's analysis of *Boyz 'N' The Hood* (1991) I was able to confront the level of internalised racism I had not previously noticed in my own consciousness, which later informed my practice. hook's work also makes it possible to analyse other films that focus in the representation of Black male identities. British made film, *Brotherhood* (2016), the last film in the 'hood' series comprising of *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Adulthood* (2008) which follows the story of London Black youths that become involved in gangs and drugs in order to survive, presents a narrative that crime is the easiest way for a Black youth to succeed. The main protagonist in this final instalment, Sam, is released from prison after killing Trevor in a previous film. Within this narrative Sam is working four jobs to provide for the late Trevor's family as he tries to make an honest living. A key decision in the film is where Sam is offered a large amount of money to return to a life of crime, to which he declines and is set upon by Trevor's uncle. This narrative vastly differs from the other 'hood' films and attempts to present an 'alternative' life to crime even though crime is an ever-present motive throughout the film and the life of crime is heavily glamorised throughout the narrative.

Though these two films were released 25 years apart, the messages that are presented are still similar. Black men are not able to fulfil the white imperial patriarchal ideal and due to this, resort to commit crime. The time period between these two films shows that there is a legacy present of showing Black men in this way which then, affects their treatment in a social context. In the location that I lived, it is often these images that

the people I encountered compared me with, and due to not matching up to these images, it was that I was thought of, not being Black enough.

The mediated construction of Blackness on screen, presents Blackness in a negative way for the self-interest of the dominant culture and this is a legacy that has been longstanding in which bell hooks states:

“...19th and 20th century representations, black men were cartoon-like creatures only interested in drinking and having a good time. Such stereotypes were an effective way for white racists to erase the significance of black male labor from the public consciousness. Later on, these same stereotypes were evoked as reasons to deny black people jobs. They are still evoked today. (hooks,1992: 90)

This being another example in the way in which the west is set out to benefit the dominant white culture.

In the contemporary setting in which I find myself currently, it could be suggested that the current representations of Black men are still currently still prominent due to the staffing in media-based platforms within the West. In many cases the dominant culture having control over what is shown on British screens and due to the dominant culture's fascination with the culture other, large profit can be generated from this interest.

Motions of protest to move from this landscape of negative representations of Black men that have happened since the 20th and 21st century have ‘...inspired white filmmakers (for an example Quentin Tarrantino and Larry Clark) to exploit mainstream interest in the “other” in ways that have simple created new forms of primitivism’ (hooks,1996:8) examples of this being *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Hoop Dreams* (1994).The lineage of this has socio-economic factors are important to make clear within the landscape of film. Katharine Bausch in the article ‘Superflies into Superkillers: Black Masculinity in Film from Blaxploitation to New Black realism (2013) states that:

while black men have always been a site for anxiety and imagination in American society, in the 1990s, *young* Black men became the target of a renewed sensibility. The received attention from all forms of media: newspapers, television reports, music and so on (2013)

With the use of American media outlets presenting young Black men as violent and involved with gang affiliation, the American dominant culture was then left in limbo between being afraid of Black men whilst also being drawn in to participate in their fictional constructed culture. Though this is also true in Britain whereby although Black people are treated badly due to their assigned position in society, they are also used in advertising for being 'cool' playing in accordance to their fictional constructed image. In the context of film there are clear comparisons that can be made between both Britain and America when looking at the presentation of Black men. Therefore, I would like to briefly make reference to Blaxploitation films, that were prominent between 1969 and 1974, as their aim was to reclaim Blackness from a White power structure, with Black protagonists and Black casts going against Hollywood films (which at the time only had Black characters as sidekicks and minor roles). It should be made clear that the rise of Blaxploitation films was more complex than Black people wanting to see themselves in film, as there was a political agenda behind this. 'In October 1969 when the American Justice department threatened to sue six film studios for discrimination, Hollywood was coming under repeated attack for their racist hiring practices and depictions of African Americans (Guerrero,1993:85) producing a new kind of film that appealed to a Black audience would create profit for the studio, but also relieve the tension between the studios and minority groups. Which presents the notion that capital influenced the prominence of Blaxploitation films due to the films audience later transgressing racial boundaries. I compare this to *Brotherhood*

in which a similar situation happened to Noel Clarke, the protagonist and writer of the hood trilogy. Clarke released the film *Adulthood* in 2008 but did not release the latest film '*Brotherhood*' until 2016, which meant that the British urban genre in which Clarke had created his following began to be monopolised by the UK film studio Revolver Entertainment which released the first film '*Kidulthood*' but lost out on the later films in the series. Revolver Entertainment, then began to occupy the British urban genre with a multitude of films in a short space of time that included, *Shank* (2010), *Sket*, (2011) and *Offender* (2012). Revolver later went into administration after this due to the audience getting tired of the same kind of film about Black youths being repeated over and over again for the profit of a film studio. However, it is clear that the motives of the studio were profit rather than an opportunity to portray Black male youth positively. While it could be concluded that film increased the visibility of Black people in film at this time, narratives of systematic institutional racism that was present in both America and Britain still continued.

Though the interrogation of this work places the representation of Black men in a hegemonic, one dimensional narrative there has been a development since 2017 that have moved the argument past the landscape expressed earlier. I reference *Black Panther* (2018) released in the USA during African American Black History month. The film concerns T'Challa after the death of his Father, he returns to his African homeland of Wakanda to take his place as king. When Killmonger, a powerful enemy appears, T'challa is challenged in his authority to be king but also as Black Panther. The struggle and challenges that Killmonger presents a risk to the future of Wakanda as well as the world. In the face of danger, T'challa must work

with his allies and overcome this enemy in order to secure the future of Wakanda and the world.

While *Black Panther*, is placed within the landscape of Afro-Futurism the film engages with political geographies of European imperialism, Pan-Africanism, the slave trade, national liberation and also the US civil rights movement. The narrative presents the shared experience of Blackness throughout progressive movements, however, a drawback of the film being set in Wakanda is that the issues are retold in a fantasy setting, removing the sense of location that would allow an audience to connect the issues as being 'real'. The film references real Black events, one example where T'challa (Black Panther) attacks a Boko Haram convoy in the Sambisa Forrest. While T'challa is there to collect his former lover, Nakia, it is here we learn that she is posing as a kidnapped Nigerian to find the group's headquarters. This links directly to the #BringBackOurGirls movement that happened in 2014, the theme of stolen people is prominent throughout the narrative, giving a real-life context grounding to a fantasy film. Erik Killmonger is more than a villain in *Black Panther*, which is seen in the use of his American vernacular in contrast to T'Challa's formal accented English, placing the distance between these foes despite both characters being Black. There are also two opposing views of Black masculinity being presented with Killmonger possessing an angry posture fuelled by his African American experience, while T'challa embodies a calm, regal persona devoid of anger, signalling that he has no experience of the Black struggles due to his social position.

By watching *Black Panther*, it is the complexity between the protagonist T'Challa and villain 'Killmonger' I identified most with. Within the landscape 'Killmonger' stands in as the postmodern dual consciousness of the lived experience of a Black man living in America whilst also playing homage to the African diaspora's history, with injustice such as slavery being embodied. While T'challa, presents an aura of privilege due to being born into a position of power and not having a lived experience of the struggles that occur in the 'real world'. These two placed side by side allow the Black experience to be presented in a way that is not singular, presenting the idea that there are Black masculinities, rather than the hegemonic Black masculinity that I had become accustomed to.

In reference to Black masculinities, it is clear that Blackness is a term that needs breaking down and interrogated for it then to be applicable for an individual, which *Black Panther* allows, without the explicit interference of the white imperial patriarchy. In applying this to my own thinking, an intersectional approach is something that becomes needed in the application of representational images. As not all images or representation would apply, in regard to *Black Panther*, even though I am not African American, I understand the anger that Killmonger possesses and embodies, growing up in a place of low ethnic diversity. I also identify with T'challa, as I have also grown up in a position of privilege due to my education as well as family heritage.

A conclusion from the interrogation of print and film media is that, there has been a history in the practice of presenting Black skin negatively. However, with films such as *Black Panther* this changes the landscape from that what occurred previously. The prominence of Blaxploitation and British Urban films rose to the mainstream due to appeal given by the dominant culture and or their ability to profit from them. A question raised within this landscape of Blackness at this time, is there a glass ceiling for Black people on an aesthetic front? While *Black Panther* offers a different narrative to films mentioned previously, the film itself is placed in the landscape of fantasy, so cannot in essence be used as social commentary in the same way *'Boyz 'n' The Hood* or the *'Hood'* films are in comparison.

As I began to think critically about the films that I had consumed and the representations constructed within this work, I began to question the making of films that move past the typecast roles. How does this affect my position socially? It is clear in representation there are many different factors that affect how a Black person is represented, and in this, there is not often a representation that fits or represents Black masculinity that occurs in a place of low ethnic diversity with the same lived experience that I have had. It is because of this I have to analyse the influences that I have consumed and identify the intersections that I have in order for me to create practice that presents my own perspective. As media representation affects the lens that I am viewed through I must both interrogate how I am seen but also, how I see myself through these mediated lenses.

2.3 Black Men and Women

To begin the discussion of the relationality of Black men and women I refer to Eddie Murphy's *RAW* (1987) stand up show. I focus on this as, although this performance now seems dated, narratives that are presented within this performance are still being contested today in regard to gender politics (Murphy's work gives an insight into the way in which gender politics are embodied, by Black Men in the media). During this performance Murphy connects his masculinity to his heterosexual sexuality, whilst referring to women in strictly misogynist terms and states "women don't want to hear declarations of love but want to be fucked to death" (*RAW*, 1987).

The focus on sexuality, throughout this performance highlights the importance that sexuality had in the performativity of Blackness in the West caused by the inability to fulfil the phallocentric patriarchal ideal. In the (post-civil rights) landscape where Murphy's work occurs, even though Black people were legally meant to be seen as equal, they were still not able to obtain work easily so that they could become the breadwinners of their respective households. In many households, this led to Black women being the earners within Black families due to their ability to get jobs in service fields. This systematic perceived 'castration' of the Black male due to them not being able to be seen as equal to the white male led to the Black male focussing on the "playboy" narrative instead of building an alternative definition of masculinity. Instead, the fantasy narrative that Black men

hung onto in was that their sexuality would be their site of protest in the face of racism from the dominant culture(hooks,1992).

In relation to *RAW* hooks states '[a]s a phallocentric spectacle, Raw announces that black men are controlled by their penises ("it's a dick thing") and assert the sexual politic that is fundamentally anti- body' (hooks, 1992: 103). This means that if the Black male is controlled by his penis, the woman, in this landscape must also become an object. This is doubly problematic as it prevents the Black male from becoming autonomous while also creating a distrust between Black men and Black women.

This exploration of *RAW* also highlights gender politics between Black men and women in which the slave narrative is still present, that is, whereby Black men have internalised the gender norms set out by the dominant culture. hooks states that:

Black male phallocentricism constructs a portrait of a woman as immoral, simultaneously suggesting that she is irrational and incapable of reason. Therefore, there is no need for Black men to listen to women or to assume that woman have knowledge to share (hooks, 1992: 103).

It must be noted that phallocentricism is still present in rap music videos and film in the present day and these images are celebrated without argument by Black men. hooks states that these representations, allow the '.... White supremacists [to] seek to gain public acceptance and support for the genocidal assault on Black men, particularly the youth (hooks, 1992:109). That is in some cases the white dominant culture takes the fictitious representations as truth to validate the unfair treatment to young black men. As the negative representations that are

present on screen without protest from Black men, these images are accepted as “truth” and there is a further marginalisation between the dominant culture and Black men.

I refer again to *Boyz n’ The Hood*, part of the New Black Realist Film generation, to expand on the relationship between freedom and sexuality.

Katherine Bausch states:

In *Boyz* Tre is threatened by police officers when he is driving back from the city. Emasculated, he goes to his girlfriend’s house and engages in sexual intercourse for the first time. While he does not attack her, she is at first bewildered by his desire. Tre, then, in order to throw off the yoke of the police authority, sexually asserts himself. However, while viewers are cued thematically to sexuality and freedom, this is complicated by the conclusion of the film. In the conclusion of *Boyz*, Tre’s best friend Ricky is murdered and the representation of Ricky’s sexuality, his son, screams when Ricky’s murder is revealed. Furthermore, Doughboy, Ricky’s brother, a stereotypical player having different women under his gaze throughout the film, is also killed at the end of the film. Tre is the only male character who engages in monogamous, heterosexual, and protected sex, and is also the only protagonist to survive.(2013)

What is able to conclude from these two narratives is that Black male sexuality is not the saving grace that is presented in *RAW*, rather, the landscape is complex in which *Boyz* and *Raw*, come from opposing stances in regard to protest in the face of racism. *RAW* eludes to a stance in which Black male sexuality is a place of power for Black men, a place of protest within an oppressed landscape, while *Boyz* critiques this fantasy as untrue and emphasises that Black male sexuality is in response to institutional racism and this sexualised behaviour is a coping mechanism due to these social, political issues.

There is something that should be made clear within the landscape of Black masculinity and that is that American social politics contain a different class

system for Black people. Martin Luther King's movement was meant for the Black middle class, with the idea that Black families could integrate due to the fact that they already conform to white dominant culture's social norms. While 'Black Power' seemed to call for virulent race pride, physical resistance to the white supremacy and colonialism, and raising the social and political consciousness of the entire race. '(Bausch, 2013). Recognising this difference allowed the realisation that there is not a singular way of presenting an alternative performance of Black masculinity but also that America's ethnic hierarchies are very different to Britain. Nevertheless, this does not stop American politics and representation from being present in Britain. I recall the teaching of the civil rights movement in Ivybridge, though it was brief, the school focussed on Martin Luther King speech with no mention of the Black power movement. This was possibly due to Martin Luther King's speech being easier to present to the dominant white population, an idealised narrative in which a Black person spoke, and America listened.

In conceptualising Martin Luther King's movement as well as the Black Power movement, it presents an intersection of Blackness, that is that Blackness, while rejected by the dominant culture within the west, attempts to conform to the western class system. Due to this, in order to successfully analyse my sense of self, I have to interrogate my own intersection of class to create an understanding of my own 'Black masculinity'.

An ongoing narrative throughout Thiong'o and hooks presentation of work is the presence of the Western White patriarchy within the construction portrayal,

performance and the representation of Black masculinity. In both colonialism and representation within the Western media, aspects of living the “Western way” are shown and celebrated through taught mediums. The difference between the two is the placement of the Western White patriarchy within both narratives; when talking about colonialism, the White imperial patriarchy invades a place alien to them to boost their economic and geographical assets. In academic endeavours, work has been given in decolonising the African Diasporas mind to contest this. However, in relation to the representation of Blackness within the West, bell hooks states:

Black people have not systematically challenged these narrow visions, insisting on a more accurate “reading” of the black male reality. Acting complicity with the status quo, many Black people have passively absorbed narrow representations of Black masculinity, perpetuated stereotypes, myths, and offered one- dimensional accounts (hooks,1992: 89).

If this is true in urban settings where there is a significant proportion of ethnic diversity, this is even more pervasive in places of low ethnicity, due to there not being a community to protest these representations.

2.4 Black Man Relationality in Practice

The practical output of this stage of the practice as research project was an experiment named the ‘*Magical Dual Heritage Baby*’, inspired by the over representation of light skinned black children used in advertising. The exploration of this topic allowed myself to develop my thought process in the context of the relationality between the dominant culture and myself by using the ‘magical dual heritage baby’ as a symbolic metaphor for the lived experience that I had lived

with, in particular the ‘mixed dual heritage baby’ that was always discussed in conversations that I did not start, entertain nor wanted to have.

In living in a place of low ethnic diversity I have had a number of relationships with partners from a different ethnicity to mine, and in those relationships, it became a frequent occurrence that people would mention how cute our children would be. Those conversations were which fuelled with the idea that I would have mixed, light skin babies that would be “cute” and often people would comment that they would “love a mixed baby”. Due to the frequency of these comments, it began to feel like if my partner and I had a child at the time, one of the key characteristics of that child would be their aesthetic value.

I thus began to develop the performance of the magical dual heritage child as a useful way of negotiating ideas of Blackness discussed earlier in the chapter, aesthetics, representation and also the relationship between Black men and sexuality. The ‘magical dual heritage baby’ relates to all these issues in the same instance whilst also encompassing the relationality between myself and the dominant culture.

In this one-to-one experiment, an audience member and I create a digital baby using software, which was a merge of both of our faces (Appendix 2). This was done in reference to presence of mixed children in advertising but also to create a hypothetical situation in order for both myself and the audience member in to discuss race and ethnicity in a more relaxed scenario as the child was not ‘real’. Race has always been concerned with aesthetics, and the experiment

allowed the audience and myself to explore this, yet it also allowed us to discuss how representation has influenced the teaching and continuation of race.

As this work was performed in Plymouth a level of locational context was included, with one of the main aims of the experiment being to see how the overrepresentation of light skinned Black children had affected the view of Black people in this location. The experiment often had a white participant and, as the aim of this part of the project was to interrogate the relationality I had with the dominant culture, I felt this work benefited the research project.

The practice was based on a semi structured interview, which was done in order to be able to get into conversation about race and ethnicity in the most natural way possible. However, it was difficult to create a situation that was 'natural' in a studio setting. There also was a level of ambiguity present of the relationship between myself and the participant throughout the performance. Was I the performer and the audience member the participant? Or was I the interviewer and the participant the interviewee? As there were cameras present and the participant knew that they were being recorded it could have been possible for both me and the participant to both be performers, attempting to act in a politically correct way and to demonstrate our liberal views within this context. As I had been invested in representation throughout this research project, I was conscious of how I would seem on screen and due to being aware of the final outcome of this piece, I acted accordingly. The participant may have also attempted to be perceived positively, meaning they would not want to be seen as racist in this situation even though they may have internalised racial social politics

through digital media. This experiment allowed me to think about the relationality between myself and the dominant culture in a different way through the use of this practice. Within the performance the “child” was comparable to “race” due to the fact that the child was a made-up scenario in this context similar to race, as the way the child was discussed within the performance in relation to aesthetics, stereotypes and aspirations. In the context of relationality between myself and the participant in the performance, the “child” was something that was shared between us, in that we shared “British-ness” in the context of the performance. As within this scenario we were both discussing this fictional child, we were in turn, bringing the child to “life” whilst creating a narrative, which I connected to my own family through the use of this practice. The reference that I thought of in particular was how generationally my family had renounced their heritage, this done in reaction to the dominant culture’s influence whether through colonialism or through the treatment that they received while being in Britain.

From the onset of this practice I had the intention of using the dual heritage children into a larger scale performance, as each child created was saved onto my laptop. What later happened was that my laptop broke which meant that the children saved were lost, but the losing of these images allowed a time of reflection of this process. Through this practice I came to the conclusion that I was in fact the “dual heritage” child due to being born “Black” but raised “British” which is often seen as white. But due to being aesthetically dark, I am seen as dark and in relation to Black stereotypes.

After considering and reviewing the work, I noticed that the work that I had created had similar findings to the first practice output that I created earlier (*What Colour Do You See?*) as this work was also concerned with Race with the addition of representation. The work that had been created did not feature my own “voice” in relation to my own identity and again relied on the dominant culture to assign me a position. Through practice, I had come to the realisation that I had internalised racist ideologies that I had observed, accepting that I was lessor than the dominant culture. I developed this thinking to create a performance that showed the issue that I had discovered in my own thinking, that there is a cultural, aesthetic and social imbalance that Black people in low ethnic diversity has to negotiate. The lack of diversity had altered my thinking to a degree that I noticed that I had not found a creative voice in this project as of yet, rather narrated an issue that I had noticed on a day to day basis but also in my mindset and my thinking. This is what allowed me to leave this type of performance behind and move to a mode of working that included my own radical voice in the landscape that I had been working in. This realisation meant that I began to work with intersectionality, in order to identify my own Black masculinity in the western ‘Black masculinities’.

Chapter Three: Intersectionality

This chapter discusses the way in which intersectionality can be utilised in order to create a performance that presents a 'self' that engages with the political, social and representational landscape of Blackness, whilst focussing on the location of Plymouth. Using intersectionality this Chapter aims to present how this method can present a "voice" to marginalised people by using my own lived experience as an example.

Intersectionality, is an approach proposed by Kimberlie Crenshaw which '...exposed and sought to dismantle the instantiations of marginalization that operated within institutionalized discourses that legitimized existing power relations (e.g., law)' (Du Bois, 2013: 304).

In *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (1991), Crenshaw highlights how sites of resistance (e.g feminism and anti-racism) could ironically cause other forms of marginalisation. Du Bois explains how 'law has historically defined the contours of sex and race discrimination through prototypical representatives, i.e. white women and African American men, respectively' (Du Bois, 2014: 304). In this discussion of race and sex, Kimberlie Crenshaw identifies that these ideas often come at the expense of Black women and uses intersectionality as a mode to argue against the objectivity that sex and race discrimination law possess. As feminism has predominantly focussed on white women and anti-racism focussed on Black men, the law does not allow a Black woman to be protected by both sex and race anti-discrimination law, making it to opt for one or the other, yet there could be a situation in which a

Black woman could be affected by both sex and race discrimination in the same instance. Through this it is possible to see that there is a loophole within law in which Black women are not protected. An example cited by Crenshaw, is that a Black woman applies for a job and is not successful even though she is fully qualified for the role. When the employer is questioned in law, they would be able to argue that they employ Black men (so they are not racist) and employ white women (so they are not sexist). Due to the lack of opportunity for a Black woman to be able to state that she is being affected by both, racial and gender discrimination at the same time, she ends up not being protected by either.

One of the reasons I use Crenshaw's application of intersectionality is due to the benefits of identifying a landscape, in this example law, which can allow a subjective, individual solution through finding out who is not covered or protected by objective policies or patterns of behaviour. This example also presents how intersectionality can allow the opportunity to see privilege, or lack of. However, as my work is concerned with Black-British men in non-urban locations, it is important to clarify that I have comparative privilege to Black men that live in urban locations.

Kojey Radical's *Water* (2018) is a performance that highlights the lived experience of a Black man living in an urban setting. The video begins with a Black person in handcuffs, a visual reference to the police and institutional racism in urban locations. Michaela Coel's voice accompanies the visuals whereby she points out how the system is not built to accommodate Black people and how

Black people often fall victim to cultural appropriation and exploitation. In addition to this, she states the following

‘With colour pigmentation, you must accept that your historically pivotal leaders were likely to be killed. With darker pigmentation, you become an example of exoticism under the Western microscope’. – Water 2018

A quote that indicates that Black skin is held in lower regard in the west, as it is expected that leaders are going to be killed instead of it being a shock, people have become accustomed to this as if it were part of the status quo. As well as this Black people must experience being seen as different.

The piece develops and parallels can be drawn between this video and Childish Gambino’s *This is America* by the way both videos main topics being about social commentary in relation to race, politics that do not protect Black people and the power imbalances that the Black community face, with Gambino referencing the shooting of Black people in church and Radical referencing the helplessness that Black people feel after Grenfell knowing that no one was ever prosecuted after many people lost their lives (at time of writing). This clear in the line “how did you sleep through the violence? You just get used to the sirens, you just got stuck in the cycle.” Both of these performances give insight into the feelings and the lived experience that Black people face in America and London.

By way of exploring the Black-British complexity, I had to account for that the term itself is intersectional, as it works within the landscape of both ‘Blackness’ as well as ‘British-ness’. In reviewing Blackness, references can be used from narratives in places where there is whiteness and a clear dominant culture,

so American narratives could be included with caution, while British narratives too depended on more than just being in Britain. In order to clarify my own position as a Black-British male, it is necessary to break these intersections down further so I am able to identify how certain characteristics can affect my social standing as Black- British is a term too broad and allows objectification of myself as an individual.

Working with this notion, it was important to locate the fields to which my work is concerned which include racism, pedagogy and media representation. Fixing the borders that the project works within, allows for marginalised individuals to be seen subjectively, instead of being grouped with the assumption that every person within a marginalised group has the same lived experience. This is in fact one of the key issues in a large number of anti-discrimination movements. Speaking on intersectionality Lind summarises intersectionality as ‘a multifaceted perspective acknowledging the richness of the multiple socially-constructed identities that combine to create each of us as a unique individual’ (Lind, 2010: 3)

In the proceeding chapters I have discussed in depth race and representation. However, for the purposes of this chapter It will be beneficial to briefly touch upon these issues again. Race refers to the lived experience of the Black man, as there has been a history of Western media depicting Black men negatively due to inability to fulfil the Western patriarchal ideal. As I lived outside of ethnically diverse locations such as London and Birmingham, I have subconsciously conformed to the politics of the dominant culture which has

allowed for me to be able to avoid negative treatment in the most part. However, in doing this I have accepted the power imbalances without argument. As hooks explains 'the image of black masculinity that emerges from slave narratives is one of the hardworking men who longed to assume full patriarchal responsibility for families and kin' (hooks, 1992:89). Though this has been a popular representation on screen, in Plymouth, I have been able to obtain work and succeed in the workplace which may have not been possible in urban locations

Another field included in this variation is the absence of non-generalised, subjective reading of Black men in media representation, which reiterates ideas of racism to the dominant culture. As bell hooks states in *Reel to real: Race, Sex and class at the movies* (1996) 'everyone who has ever exploited depictions of racial stereotypes that degrade black people and perpetuate white supremacy could argue that they are merely showing life as it is' (hooks, 1996:9). Although, there has been progressive movements in Black male representation with films such as *Black Panther* (2018) and *Moonlight* (2016) the vast historical presentation of Black men means that the negative representations are the ones that the dominant culture, call upon in lesser ethnically diverse areas due to the fact that those images are the most familiar. The representation I reference present Black men being shown on screen 'as failures who are psychologically "fucked up", dangerous, violent, sex maniacs whose insanity is informed by their inability to fulfil their phallocentric masculine destiny in a racist context' (hooks, 1992:89) and it is this image that I have historically been held in comparison to in my life in Plymouth. It is for this reason that my final project worked towards presenting a

critically aware performance to engage conversations about the aged views toward Black men in Plymouth.

The final route in this version is pedagogy, which is often concerned with the erasing of colonial teachings from the current lived experience. This so Black skin is visible without the comparison to the dominant culture. This can be seen in the decolonisation of Kenya whereby academics reverted back to their vernacular tongue, which was discussed earlier in this thesis. This raises questions such as, in a situation like the one I was born into, how would it be possible to erase colonial thought processes when it has been instilled in my family historically? As my family has placed emphasis on the importance to value British culture and knowing no other culture to identify with, what is a solution to this problem? When discussing this through the lens of intersectionality, it must be noted that academic endeavours have often focussed on urban ethnic diverse locations, assuming that the outcomes of such studies can be applied to locations of low ethnic diversity, when this is not possible. When I attended the 'Black Theatre symposium' (2015) It was raised that representation of young Black men should still be a site of protest due to the negative treatment Black men still receive in Britain, yet, this suggestion received mixed responses from the audience and the academics present. It then was argued that the focus should move past the issues of Black representation and move towards other marginalised Black communities that have not yet had visibility on screen such as the Black LGBT community. Although this is clearly important, due to representation of the Black LGBT community being extremely limited, I noticed that the rural representation of Black masculinity was another intersection within Blackness that is marginalised. I

recount some academics concluding that the representations of heterosexual Black men have been solved and, collectively, the Black academic community should invest their research and energy in other marginalised intersections of Blackness. It is key to identify that the symposium was located in London, and the ethnic makeup of that city vastly differed from Plymouth, so it was not possible to link the arguments and the conclusions reached in this location. However, it was not a concern to the Black academics present the lived experience of Black people that do not live in an urban, ethnically diverse location as it was not an intersection of Blackness that they were familiar with.

Crenshaw's application of intersectionality in relation to Black women, is helpful in the way that it highlights the complexity of the Black experience but also the complexity of other marginalised communities such as, the LGBTQ and disabled communities whom also suffer from being collectively grouped within activism. Although this is not an exhaustive list, I comment on other narratives of marginalisation to present the issues of others but also the benefits of an intersectional approach.

The process that I had become concerned with was presenting an intersectional narrative of being a Black British born male in a non-urban location. My personal lived experience is a narrative that differs from other Black masculinities that are visible in the media and it is important that I find the intersections that inform my lived experience in order to present the notion that Black masculinity is not hegemonic but instead fluid.

Thus, the beginning of this stage of my project concerned finding my identity markers within Blackness through intersectionality. So, I am able to present an individual narrative of my lived experience it was necessary to analyse intersections such as: gender, class, place of living, level of education, ethnicity and nationality, as it is through the meeting of these intersections, using the autobiographical and autoethnographic methodological approaches explored through practice the complexity of Blackness is able to be uncovered.

Reflecting on practice I noticed that I had not yet presented my own lived experience throughout my work, as the 'Magical Dual Heritage Child' experiment depended on the dominant culture in creating a narrative. In the 'What colour do you see' experiment I recited the words and racial slurs that I had experienced whilst living in Devon. Both of these pieces of practice relied on the dominant culture to categorise me socially, and I in turn took away my own agency in these performances. It is intersectionality that allowed myself to begin thinking about how I am 'made up' by different intersections. Breaking the Black-British intersections into smaller intersections made me able to be seen as an individual, and then to present this in an artistic form.

The first piece of practice exploring with this notion was the performance named 'What Are You Saying' (Appendix 3). This work was presented as a podcast originally, aiming to take away the visual aspect of piece in order for the performance not to be associated to the mediated representational images of Blackness. This work concerned with the intersection between my place of living, and its limited ethnic diversity, as I wanted to present this aspect of my lived

experience. This practice was influenced by my work environment, where I worked in a call centre, speaking to customers over the phone regarding various complaints. Due to the customers not being able to see my face, I noticed that I was treated differently over the phone, as many assumed that I was a White male due to my name as well as my accent. This was an uncommon experience of being in a situation in which my colour was not a subject of a conversation, I was able to 'pass' and was valued for my ability to do the job. I worked this job for a year while raising money to continue this Master's project and it was at this time I noticed that when working I was in fact a 'universal man' enjoying the freedom from my Blackness. However, this freedom was short lived because as soon as a phone call ended, I was returned to my lived experience of being a Black man living in Plymouth.

Through this I noticed the flaw in the practice, this being that in taking away image I was allowing myself to be seen as 'white', as by relying uniquely on my voice there was no way of identifying that I was a Black male in the story and by not showing my face meant that a listener could possibly associate my voice and accent as a white male. (a practice which is often referred to as 'whitewashing'). This rendered my piece extremely problematic as the practice of 'whitewashing' is rather prominent in mediated images and representation, where by Black images and messages are appropriated to appease a white audience.

It was at this point I began to uncover and activate an intersectional understanding of my identity. As a key issue with this piece was the tone of the work that highlighted the differences between the dominant culture and myself

and emphasised the ways I had been treated differently. Young states, 'Western culture has always been defined against the limits of other, and culture has always been taught as a form of cultural difference' (Young,1994:89). In the last piece of work created for this research I attempted to create a narrative that was complicit with dominant culture's narrative of the 'other' by presenting a landscape of 'Them' vs 'me' fully recognisant that this phenomenon is more complex than this. Rather the narrative that needed to be presented was that as a Black-British born male, I am negotiating positions of privilege due to some of my intersections but that I also experience a degree of marginalisation due to other intersections that I embody. I can be accepted as British and part of the dominant culture due to my accent, name, education and learned culture which are all facets that render me conformant to the dominant culture, but I am also Black which is an identifier that renders me an 'other'. Due to this, I am constantly negotiating positions of white privilege due to these intersections I am found within.

(Please see Appendix 4- *Welcome To My City* in)

Considering the fields discussed earlier I now reflect on how the piece *Welcome to my city* addressed these topics. *Welcome to my city* was made in collaboration with Jullian Irvine, a Black male also living in Plymouth and uses images of Plymouth for locational context with the language working alongside the images to reference the intersection of place of living. The first line of the piece-:

*'Welcome to my city, though I'm not sure if I can call it mine
Because people are constantly enquiring of where I come from'*

relates directly to colonial and representational narratives paired with anecdotal personal accounts of what happens in my experience in places of low ethnic diversity. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) states that 'The Negro is enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with neurotic orientation' (Fanon, 1967:60). It could be noted that in the line referenced in my practice, my uncertainty is due to my internalised inferiority complex due to not being confident in stating that I am from Plymouth but also Britain.

The lived experience that I have starts with my name, Nathaniel Turner, as when written I can be seen as 'White' due to both my forename and surname being popular names in Britain. Within the context of employment, when I place my name on top of my CV, next to my qualifications, place of living, it could be assumed that I am 'white'. Therefore, when applying for a job and later getting a phone interview, I can be seen as 'white', it is only at the point of a face to face interview the employer would be able to identify that I am Black. I use this example in relation to my intersections as it is possible to identify the privilege, I am given due to some intersections I inhabit allow me to be viewed as part of the dominant culture. This gives me a fair opportunity within the context of employment and as such I cannot account for those who have names that present their Blackness. Through this example a conclusion that could also be drawn is that I am only viewed as Black at the final stage of the process. This highlights a complexity of the 'Black-British' experience in that it could be at the point of interview that I am rejected due to my colour as it is only at this point that I have been seen to be Black.

Outside the example of employment, speaking about myself through the landscape of intersectionality, I find myself in limbo as a Black-British born male, due to being visible in colour as different but also invisible due to my conformance to the western capitalist patriarchy. It is this that directly influences the perspective of the work, as the white man (the dominant population) still does not accept the Black man as being part their culture. As stated before, one of the possible reasons for this could be the presence of representation and the prominence of stereotype within media which maintains the narrative of cultural and racial difference. Homi K Bhabha states in *The other question: The stereotype and colonial discourse* (1983):

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the Ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise, the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated ... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (Bhabha, 1983: 293)

Due to this narrative being present regarding racial politics and stereotypes, *Welcome To My City* was focussed on two things, creating work that explored my intersections (in order for it to present a subjective perspective to a marginalised objectified body) but also for the work to be communicative to the dominant white population.

Within the performance I use humour and satire in reference to the racial stereotypes that I had faced, to highlight the ideological construction of otherness

presented through the use of stereotype. Humour is important in the delivery of this piece, as by laughing at a joke a person can accept the ideology that the joke stands for whilst also bringing attention to the issue the joke represents. The line “I don’t like watermelon, but you like fried chicken though” explores this, signalling that I am able to laugh in the face of racism due to my ‘Britishness’ but stating that I also contest this at the same time. This line is used to present the conflict that I have in regard to my Black and British intersections.

In this piece I also reference the jokes I endured through my Devon schooling, the person telling a racist joke would often cite that I was “their Black friend” so it was “ok” for them to tell the joke. Upon the delivery of the joke I would force a fake laugh, saving face when placed in a position of discrimination. This to visibly express my conformance to the dominant culture, presenting my ‘Britishness’ publicly due to the British culture often being defined against the borders of the ‘other’. Frantz Fanon states ‘The Black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man’ (Fanon,1967:17).

Although I am aware racial politics have progressed since the writing of Fanon, his work is important to this process for many reasons, a key one being that this is the understanding of racial difference that I have inherited from my family and due to this, influences the outlook I have on myself. This quote also has a basis within my own lived experience. I recall when I was younger my parents discussing how to ‘sound white’ when answering the phone with an exaggerated English accent to avoid negative treatment. This, however, is a memory that happened over ten years ago and although I do not live in an ethnic diverse location, I find myself still using my ‘white dimension.’ Though my ‘Black’ dimension is something that is

somewhat unclear, due to my learning of British culture and not having an “original” culture to revert back to, how would I create a Black voice? It is this that essentially informs my choice of voice in this practical element of the work as ‘Blackness’ is a social tag connected to my skin and in turn my treatment socially has meant there has been a constant limbo of being in-between Black and White, or ‘other’ and ‘British’. Due to the absence of my ‘fellows’ and my learnt behaviour of the ‘white dimension’ of my own ‘voice’, key aspects of my identity have developed similar to that of the white man, causing the inception of an, internalised sense of racism but the complexity is further especially when I reflect on the absence of my ‘Black dimension’.

Due to having learnt a singular culture and knowing no other culture besides being British, an issue becomes clear of how my ‘Black dimension’ would occur. It is clear my lived experience informs my Black voice rather than it being taught through having another culture. My ‘Black dimension’ therefore is something that I have learnt in reaction to the treatment of the dominant culture treating me as an ‘other’.

This process of creating practice with the aim of finding a voice allowed myself to see myself subjectively, rejecting the broad definition of “Black-British” whilst finding other insights that I overlooked in previous practice settings. In the creation of *Welcome To My City*, I noticed the lack of members of my own culture and heritage in my upbringing. I lacked a ‘Black’ culture and community near me to “keep me in check” which has altered my voice and experience which became integral to creating this work. Frantz Fanon states:

overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him (Fanon, 1967: 110)

I reference my education due to the taught colonial ideas embedded in the curriculum, I in turn had learnt to internalise these ideas. In the Devon classroom setting, my school focussed on the Slave Trade and the Civil Rights movement and outside of these topics, discrimination was not something that had been discussed. While not explicitly stated, nationalism influenced the way in which history was told, which meant that I learnt my history through the British lens. The narrative presented was that racism is in the past and not something people experience in Devon due to the lack of diversity, when it was precisely this lack of diversity that affected my day to day lived experience.

As I had unknowingly accepted and internalised colonial ideas, I made links to the colonial teaching in Kenya, as this could have been the origins of the thought processes that I internalised. I had reached a point within my research project where I had found reasons for how I behaved and negotiated my lived experience, the feeling stemming from 'why am I not treated the same as the white man?' when I have learnt to aspire to be a part of the dominant culture due to not having a culture to revert back to.

Education is an intersection that gives context to this feeling of not belonging within the dominant culture. Due to my thought process favouring the dominant culture, I see that I am not taught a full history of my Black skin by the dominant culture, I instead learned about my own skin through the lens of that

dominant culture in which I am not included in. As the Black-British intersection is not one that is often visible historically, it is now presented on screen as a recent phenomenon, with people like myself not knowing the solution to be treated as part of the dominant culture, as learning a new culture at this stage is extremely difficult.

At this point I comment on the issue with my two broad intersections that I began with, these being 'Black' and 'British' I raise this due to the ambiguity in the borders of these two intersections in my own lived experience. There is not a border in Blackness and my Britishness, it is a position that one gives validity to the other. It is widely accepted that Britishness is something that in itself lacks fixity due to imperial colonialism, slavery, immigration, as well as the appropriation of other cultures but also my Blackness has the same issues, albeit due to different circumstances, as 'Black popular culture, strictly speaking, ethnographically speaking, there are no pure forms at all. Always these forms are the product of partial synchronization, of engagement across cultural boundaries, of the confluence of more than one cultural tradition, of the negotiations of dominant and subordinate positions, of the subterranean strategies of recording and transcoding, of critical signification, of signifying. Always these forms are impure, to some degree hybridized from a vernacular base.' (Hall, 1996: 471). The dominant culture often categorises the lived experience of any Black body as the 'Black experience' and in Plymouth this is an issue of concern due to the location alone makes the 'Black experience' very different to urban and diverse locations. This is the reason for the *Welcome To My City* video presenting this complexity through the removal of my face in the images, presenting the narrative that my

lived experience is not one that is visible in Plymouth (an invisibility that also extends to the academic landscape).

Each intersection discussed within this chapter was utilised in the video performance of *Welcome To My City* the digital performance placed in video format to reach a larger audience than Plymouth. The film was shown at *Aesthetica Short Film Festival* (2017) in York though the performance has not yet been shared publicly.

There are a few reasons for not sharing this work publicly as of yet, one of which being, how would this work be received outside of Plymouth? Would the audience be able to receive the work as my own personal exploration of 'Blackness' through an intersectional approach? The issue with this is that if I present this piece and it is received as work that is applicable to all Black men, it would be counterproductive to other Black people living in Plymouth. Therefore, my interpretation of my lived experience could possibly be held as 'truth'. Another reason for not sharing is also my own family, some of whom I have recently become in contact with, and as they live in ethnically diverse places, they would possibly not be able to relate or understand the message that I am attempting portray due to their intersectional make up being different to mine. A main reason is that my Mother may reap the consequences from my family due to 'taking us away' from Wolverhampton, an ethnically diverse place in which my family all live, whilst also my family may contest the capitalist imperialism and colonial teaching that is ingrained in the make-up of our family.

Having said this, the personal gain of creating *Welcome To My City* is far greater than any reservations I have had about sharing the piece to a wider audience. I have established that my intersectional experience is different to others, however, the purpose is to inspire individuals that experience the complexities that I have. Through the broadcasting of an auto ethnographical digital performance, I would allow a broader demographic to access it outside the location that the work is situated. The possible generated relatability to this piece would encourage an exploration of identity by persons finding themselves in intersections different to my own.



Figure 4.1: *Welcome To My City performance (2017)*

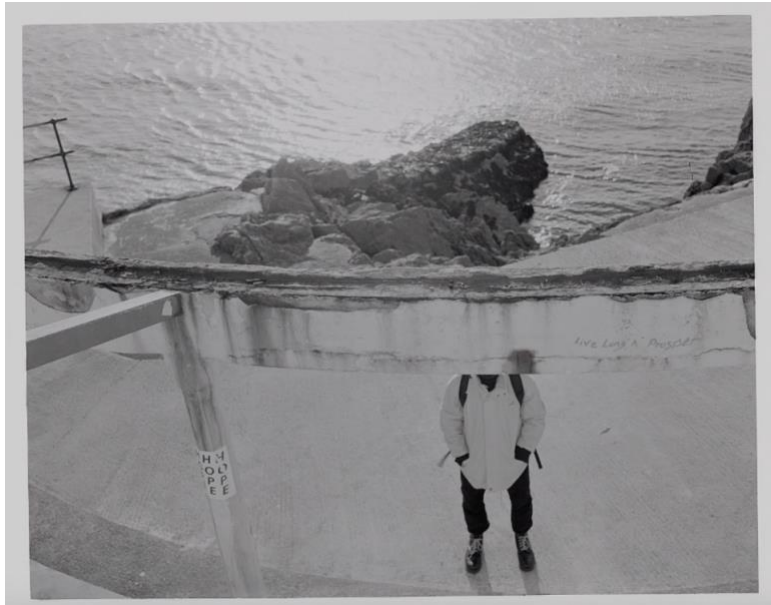


Figure 4.2: Welcome To My City *performance* (2017)

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to create an understanding of my own position within the context of Black masculinity in a location of low ethnic diversity. This conclusion highlights my findings in relation to the questions raised in the introduction of this piece.

As this project was interrogated through practice as research, the work was informed by the influence of mediated representation, colonialism and the ontology of Black men in contemporary Britain. As representation is a key topic within this work, the methodological approach has seen me create and perform a representation of myself in order to generate an alternative narrative- one that is opposing to that of the hegemonic Black masculine lived experience that occurs in urban landscapes, which is often visible in popular culture. I evidently reflected and critiqued my practice outcomes throughout the work. As the practice is a personal response to social issues that I have faced, it was often difficult as a researcher to present these experiences accurately and communicate the complexity within my lived experience. However, upon reflection of this research I have located a sense of individuality due to being made aware of my unique characteristics that make up my identity, through the exploration of intersectionality.

The grounds of my understanding of identity were initially developed in relation to my race and ethnicity, in particular when studying Young and Fanon's approaches to these topics. Race and ethnicity can affect the way in which a person is treated,

as referenced throughout this piece, particularly in a place of low ethnic diversity. Therefore, it was highly important to understand the origins of these terms when creating practice. I initially evaluated and examined how these elements had affected myself but also my family both consciously and subconsciously. For myself, it was a difficult process due to having many coping mechanisms in place that prevented the feeling of inferiority. However, as an awareness of these coping strategies was developed, practice operated as a vital tool in the process of questioning the issues in my own thinking.

As the aforementioned elements have always been defining components of my identity, with a better understanding of Young and Fanon's theories, I found a way of negotiating practice that allowed a level of agency. It has been discussed extensively, throughout the first two chapters that my race and ethnicity were imposed on me by both the dominant culture as well as my family, resulting in an intersectional analysis of being and living as a Black British male.

In Chapter One I reference the performance, *What Colour Do You See?* as an initial exploration of the ontological value of my Black skin found within a place with a clear dominant population. Through experimentation, specifically applying Black and white paint onto my skin in a studio setting, I made the decision to make myself the subject within the research. It was then made possible to progress through the work using an autoethnographic approach without the addition of my lived experiences prior to the work. This conscious decision of putting myself in the research project, worked as a response to the lack of authenticity encountered, when only having used theoretical methodologies and investigating

experiences different to my own, in the past. In this way I was capable of creating a clear narrative of my lived experience, that was therefore able to be compared to the experiences of Black men living in urban locations.

Also discussed within this thesis is how the representation of Black men on mediated platforms can affect social standing. As the political reality of Blackness has always concerned aesthetics, the project went on to interrogate mediated representations of Black masculinity, in particular popular western landscapes. bell hooks in this thesis introduced ideas regarding hegemonic two-dimensional representations of Black men in which the dominant culture as well as the Black community had learnt to appreciate. This allowed for films such as *Boyz 'n' The Hood*, *Brotherhood* and *RAW* to be analysed for the problematic nature of the representation of Black men through the characters and landscapes presented within them. Great emphasis was given to the projection of Black masculinity as either underprivileged or oversexualised through a biased Western lens, in Chapter Two. As this project is concerning my own identity, I used these examples as ways of exploring and therefore understanding the reasons why I had internalised issues regarding my Blackness. While my viewpoint initially was seen in relation to both colonialism and representation, I learnt to appreciate that I had been influenced by the material that I had consumed. This raised further enquiries such as, 'Did I have internalised representations of Blackness?' and 'Is it possible that the dominant culture in my current location would also have accepted these narratives?'.

In addition, *The Magical Dual Heritage Child* experiment, attempted to present how the Black man is treated in a contemporary, non-urban setting. This revealed that I had been complicit in presenting myself as an 'other', as the primary aims of the experiment were to find ways in which I was seen as different to the dominant culture. This particular research presented the 'inferiority complex' that I mistakenly believed was something that did not apply to myself, due to not living in an urban setting. Therefore, the way I progressed to the final piece of practice, was consequently altered.

The investigation of Black Panther altered the direction my practice took. T'challa within the film showed a calm regal persona, influenced by the privileges of being of high social status, while Erik Killmonger, presented his anger and frustration influenced by his lived experience growing up African American in the USA. The placing of these opposing Black masculinities showed that there is more than one lived experience of Blackness which influenced an evaluation of the differences of privilege and marginalisation in my project and how these narratives can occur at the same time. As I was able to see the two presentations of Black men placed side by side, I then proceeded to think about my own lived experience differently. Throughout this thesis my performed Black masculinity is negotiated through a position of privilege and marginalisation simultaneously. During this process I come to the realisation that my privilege derives from being brought up British in a location of low ethnic diversity. I therefore learnt to behave and comport myself in a way similar to the dominant culture. This learnt behaviour allows for a level of invisibility due to conforming to the social standards of the cultural majority. However, at the same time, I am treated like an 'other' due to being Black.

As I was concerned about what informed my treatment, intersectionality allowed to dissect this landscape further. As discussed in Chapter Three, I interrogated my intersections in order for me to create my own identity and understand how this was made up of many different distinctive features. Kimberlie Crenshaw's application of this theory was the foundation of understanding how subjectivity is important within marginalised communities. Through this, I was able to diagnose that my Black masculinity differed to narratives of others, particularly when placed in comparison to urban Black masculinities. Having studied intersectionality, I was able to see myself as an individual with my own agency instead of a 'Black male' with a collective shared experience.

It was this thinking that aided the construction of *Welcome to My City*, that presents my lived experience of being a minority in a place of low ethnic diversity and my learnt response to this. While this process heightened the complexity of this landscape, I came to an understanding that the intersections in which I am found, consequently place me on a spectrum of being both part of the dominant culture and marginalised in the same instance. *Welcome To My City*, created an alternative way of thinking of my own Blackness, I created practice that presented my individuality and lack of visibility of Blackness in Plymouth however, this is applicable to a wider context. As there is a limited amount of Black men in mediated representation and though there have been progressive movements, this has not yet changed how the dominant culture treats the Black male in my own lived experience.

As great emphasis was given to the presentation of a personal narrative and my own lived experience in Plymouth, this thesis operates as a prompt to question existing issues with representation and contributes towards the achievement of that by others. The making of a digital performance specifically, and the showcase of it on a digital platform, makes the research accessible by a broader audience and therefore opens up possibilities of relatability to the lived experience discussed.

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